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LORD SALISBURY.

BY SYDNEY BROOKS.

LORD SALISBURY was the first British Minister of the nineteenth century to combine the office of Premier with that of Foreign Secretary. The Prime Minister, it may be as well to remind American readers, has no legal position in England. He is the man commanded by the Sovereign to carry on the government, but the command brings with it neither title nor office. He is therefore obliged to legalize his status and qualify for the service of the Crown by accepting some office known to the Constitution. As a rule, Prime Ministers have contented themselves with one of those numerous posts, like that of First Lord of the Treasury or Lord Privy Seal, of which the honor is great and the duties merely nominal. It was thought something extraordinary, and another proof of his demoniacal love of work, when Mr. Gladstone added the Chancellorship of the Exchequer to the exacting duties of the Premiership. But Lord Salisbury went even further. He undertook the control of what is beyond all comparison the most burdensome and responsible post in the gift of the Sovereign. The mere routine business of the Foreign Office—the interviews with ambassadors, the reading of the dispatches that flow in at the rate of a thousand a week, the forwarding of instructions to British representatives abroad—is enough, on Lord Rosebery's testimony, to keep a busy man fully employed fifteen hours out of the twenty-four. Add to this that much of the work—all the important work, in fact—must be done by the Foreign Secretary himself and cannot be delegated either to his Under-Secretary or the permanent officials; that, more than the chief of any other department, he has a personal grip on the direction of affairs, acts largely on his own responsibility and relies on his own clearness of head, good temper and knowl-

edge of the subject; add, further, a consciousness of the immensity of the interests he represents and of the world-wide dangers a single hasty word or the slightest false move may involve, as well as, somewhere at the back of his mind, a haunting wonder of what the people will think of it all; and it would be hard to conceive a more nerve-straining post than that of British Foreign Secretary.

Nor are the duties of a Prime Minister, when properly grasped and carried out, much less absorbing. The functions of a Prime Minister under the British system are not only to dispense a certain amount of ecclesiastical patronage and act as a sort of intermediary between the Sovereign and the people and originate and expound the government's policy, but also to play the rôle of an active managing director in the Cabinet councils. This last, indeed, is his most important duty. The ideal Premier, in the current argot of English politics, should be "the foreman of his gang." His business is to keep all the threads of administration in his own hands; to supervise, without intruding on, the work of his colleagues in the Cabinet; to let nothing of any great significance happen in any department without his being informed of it, and generally "to pass up and down the line, as it were," giving to each worker the stimulus or corrective that only detached outside criticism can supply. That such an ideal is not impracticable was shown by that model administrator, Sir Robert Peel. Sir Robert made it a rule to give audience to each important member of his Cabinet every day. In this way he not only kept all his men up to their work, but knew exactly what each was doing. He shared in their responsibility, as a Prime Minister should, and they benefited by his general counsel and superintendence. Sir Robert's common-sense in such matters almost reached genius. He knew to a nicety where the line should be drawn, and, while he never degenerated into the fussy busybody, frittering away his talents on small details, he always contrived to be himself the final arbiter on all cardinal points of policy. The consequence was that the machinery of government ran with a smoothness and success that no other régime has even approached.

I cannot help sympathizing with the remark of a very observant French critic, M. Augustin Filon, that to write of Lord Salisbury one needs simply the commonest intelligence and one particular sort of courage—the courage to go on saying all the

commonplace things that have been said a thousand times already. Lord Salisbury has been on the stage of public affairs for now nearly fifty years, and always in the foreground. He has been canvassed from all possible standpoints and analyzed down to the last corpuscle. One cannot hope at this time of day to add anything to the volume of criticism that has gathered round his commanding figure, or discover a phase of his personality or an action of his career not already explored and dissected. But one may, as a sort of comment on the commentators, permissibly wonder that so many able pens should have so largely failed to rouse popular interest in him, and altogether failed to impress any firm image of his character on the public mind. For this is undeniably the case. Americans who insist on having the limelight on their statesmen from the breakfast table to the council room, can hardly conceive how few Englishmen know anything or even care to know anything about Lord Salisbury. The feeling of the bulk of the nation, I should judge, was that of almost supreme confidence in him as a statesman, tinctured with a quite frank indifference as to what manner of man he might be in private life. His habits of reserve and seclusion seemed to have killed popular interest in his personality. I am not in the least regretting this; a statesman who in these days can direct an empire and yet make no parade of himself or his private life or give a single opening to the inquisitiveness of the "incorrigible mob," is a phenomenon rare enough to be doubly attractive, and not less rare in England than in other countries. There are English statesmen to-day whom the common people feel they know through and through, whose intimate doings they follow with the closest curiosity and in whose presence they are comfortably at ease. Sir William Harcourt is such an one; Mr. Chamberlain is another; even Lord Rosebery, a far more many-sided and elusive character, the public has some inkling of; but the Marquis of Salisbury dwelt seemingly in a world of his own, remote from theirs and beyond their speculation. He never was and never could be a popular idol, as Lord Palmerston was. He had none of those little arts and graces that endear a man to the multitude. He did absolutely nothing that Englishmen like their leaders to do. He was not a golfer, like his nephew, nor a sportsman like Lord Rosebery, nor an orchid grower like Mr. Chamberlain. His pet hobby of which rumor has gone abroad—electrical engineering—is not of the sort

to kindle much general enthusiasm. Lord Salisbury filling Hatfield House with electric light was always a poor electioneering card to play against the appealing figure of Mr. Gladstone cutting down trees in the grounds of Hawarden Castle. And this, no doubt, was just as Lord Salisbury or any other man of sense would have it. From the lonely, self-sufficing life he led, apart from his colleagues, apart from society, the veil was never lifted. Platform oratory was his abomination. His position forced him now and then to yield to the demand for speeches, and he went through with his part vigorously and always ably, but his heart most plainly was not in his work. As a rule when he had anything to say that could no longer be kept to himself, he was content to address the nation from his seat in the House of Lords.

All this was a severe damper on popular enthusiasm. Lord Salisbury stood forth a towering, unadorned pillar of sound Tory principles, conspicuous to the nations; to be admired or not, as you please; but in either case to be judged simply for what it was, and not for its adventitious trappings. The average man in any country cares a good deal more for politicians than for politics; and this chilling simplicity of carriage does not attract him. No one ever thought of hanging round the Foreign Office on the off chance of being able to cheer Lord Salisbury as he got into his brougham. On the other hand, no one ever hated him enough to mob him in the streets, as some twenty-five years ago Mr. Gladstone was mobbed by a crowd of boisterous jingoes. Mr. Gladstone was perpetually the mark of passionate admiration or passionate dislike. You could not be neutral on the subject of Gladstone. But passion of any kind never entered into any one's estimate of Lord Salisbury. It was so obvious that he did not care what was thought of him that no one took the trouble to get angry. The stiffest Radical would applaud his foreign policy—was it not Mr. Labouchere who claimed that Lord Salisbury and himself were the only genuine Little Englanders in Parliament?—and think him nothing worse than an indispensable joke in domestic affairs. When they called him “a feudal baron,” or “a capital fossil” or “an Elizabethan relic,” their ferocity was exhausted. And this reticence was not due to any corresponding bashfulness on Lord Salisbury's part. It was not one of his characteristics to soften down the rigidity of his political principles or modify his caustic criticisms of what he disliked in order

to conciliate an opponent. He took, too, a most human pleasure in invective, "not being," to quote Disraeli's comment of twenty-five years ago, "a man who measures his phrases." The almost ferocious cleverness of some of his personal attacks on adversaries used to be one of England's most delightful annual scandals; and his tongue can still on occasion be as vitriolic as in the days when he compared Mr. Gladstone's policy to that of a pettifogging attorney, and apologized in the House next day most handsomely—to the attorneys. The real reason of the neutrality and colorlessness of the general attitude towards him was that he did not care one atom whether he was popular or unpopular. He made not the slightest effort to catch the applause of the many-headed; their approval did not inspirit him, for he knew it to be uninstructed; their disapproval did not disconcert him. What the people might be saying or thinking of him he had schooled himself to regard as a matter of complete, sarcastic indifference. He had possibly some of the disdain of his Elizabethan ancestors for "persons who live in small houses." He certainly had all the contempt of a man of strong intellectual qualities for the ignorance of the multitude. Somebody once said of Mr. Gladstone, "Ah, Oxford on the surface, *but* Liverpool below." Lord Salisbury was Oxford above, below and all through. Indeed, as it showed itself to the world, the essence of his character is the two-fold pride which Oxford most inculcates—the pride of birth and the pride of brain. And this, while it made him impatient of dulness and apt at times to treat stupidity as a sort of crime, while it goaded him now and then into a position or utterance not easily distinguishable from intellectual Pharisaism, had always the virtue of raising him above the clamor of the hour and accustoming him to prefer his own deliberate opinion to the uninformed and irresponsible advice of the multitude. And that is the hall-mark of strong statesmanship.

This strength to pick out a line of his own and hold to it has always been Lord Salisbury's "note." The second son of a marquis, with no reasonable prospect of succeeding to the family title and estates, he had need of some such quality to disentangle himself from a position which has led many a weaker man into a life of idle discontent. He was educated at those two famous seminaries of English statesmanship, Eton and Christ Church, Oxford. He left the 'varsity without presenting himself for a degree, and

made a tour of the colonies at a time when to have been in Canada and New Zealand and Australia was to have "travelled." He married early, and notoriously against his father's wishes. The young couple, left for a while without means, set themselves to live by work like any other professionals. It is not mere fancifulness to attribute at least part of his sense of the needs and sufferings of democracy to the days when he was one of the ablest and most vivacious of the regular contributors to the *Saturday Review* and *Quarterly*. In 1853, being then in his twenty-third year, he entered the House of Commons as M. P. for Stamford, a Lincolnshire borough, practically in the gift of his family. The Conservative party, still rent by the shock of the Free Trade movement, gave a capital opening to a capable and earnest politician, and Lord Robert Cecil quickly won his spurs. I do not propose to go over the details of his political career. They are to be found set forth with a quite extraordinary detachment of mind in Mr. H. D. Traill's volume in the "Queen's Prime Ministers" series. But one or two of the more conspicuous incidents should be touched on. It is, for instance, worth noting that in one of his earliest speeches he criticised the closing of the Black Sea to the Russian flag of war—that impossible prohibition which survived his strictures hardly twenty years. It is also worth noting that he supported the claims of the two Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia to effect the union denied to them by the treaty of 1856—thus anticipating by two decades the arguments in which he defended the emancipation of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia from Ottoman rule. There are some, too, who think that in introducing, as he did in 1857, a bill to amend the procedure of elections by substituting a voting-paper system—bringing the poll to the elector instead of the elector to the poll—Lord Salisbury showed equal prescience in forecasting the future. He came early to his beliefs, and can hardly be said to have parted with any of them; and this curious consistency of thought and policy, which in a smaller man might be mere petulant stubbornness, is in Lord Salisbury but another sign of that reasoned devotion to the few essential principles of statesmanship that is the touchstone of his whole career. We find him while still in the twenties opposing the total abolition of church rates as he would oppose it now. We find him thirty odd years ago confessing in the House of Commons that the sentiment in favor of an Established

Church "still exercises a hold over me which I regard as sacred." If Lord Salisbury were to say the same thing to-morrow, not a critic could point to a single action or utterance in the interval of these three decades that would vitiate his right to repeat in 1902 the expression of 1868. We find him in 1869, when the deaths of his elder brother and father had transferred him to the House of Lords as Marquis of Salisbury, bringing in a bill to enact that any measure which had passed one House might, subject to the assent of the Crown and the two Houses, be considered by the other House in the ensuing session. By the present arrangement bills are obliged to pass both Houses in the same session, and much valuable legislation is thereby lost. When the methods of transacting public business are revolutionized along practical lines, as they assuredly will be, Lord Salisbury's plan will not be forgotten. We find him, once more, supporting Lord Russell's bill to create life peers with the object of strengthening the upper House by an infusion of a more purely business element, and twenty years later proposing a bill to the same effect himself. We find him setting his face like a flint against the absurd Public Worship Bill of '73, just as he refused later to interfere with the Bishops' handling of the Ritualistic agitation.

It was this steadiness of conviction, animating his instinctive and unfaltering Toryism, that gave Lord Salisbury his hold over the country and the party he led. In all his speeches you find what you do not find in Mr. Gladstone's speeches, the presence of a fundamental motive, a settled and rational consistency. The student who searches Mr. Gladstone's orations for the principles and intellectual mainspring of Liberal policy will assuredly be disappointed; for Mr. Gladstone's mind worked in flashes along the surface of things; he was destitute of the restraining guidance of a coherent political creed; his enthusiasm was all for projects, not for principles. But from Lord Salisbury's speeches one could easily compile a luminous and authoritative Conservative text-book. He hardly touched a detail without showing its relation to the whole, without lighting it up with those far-reaching speculations, those sudden openings of long vistas of thought that mark the master-mind in politics; and it is just this cohesion of thought and policy that made him the greatest Conservative since Burke. Toryism is not with him a passive belief, a mere decoration to the marquisate. He has an intellectual passion for

it; he has rigorously convinced himself of its efficacy. Early in his career he broke away from his party and sacrificed the Indian Secretaryship—his first office and opening chance of brilliant distinction, which he was as brilliantly seizing—sooner than deny one particle of his faith. He fought down to the last ditch, almost single-handed, and against the very men who should have sided with him, the final battle of the old order of Conservatism. That was on the memorable occasion when Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli, after turning out their opponents for proposing a mild measure or reform, “dished the Whigs” by bringing in another that went infinitely further. Lord Salisbury probably did not then imagine that he himself would live to be the bulwark of the new order, and that under his guidance Conservatism was to regain all and more than all it had lost, take on a fresh spirit of activity and usefulness and in its revived form become the dominant creed of the country. Lord Salisbury was continually described by his detractors as an “Elizabethan.” If by that it is meant that he had an intellectual inclination towards a semi-autocratic system, based on a limited suffrage and gathering to it such counsellors as his ancestor, Lord Burleigh, they are probably right. One may easily understand that his clear-sightedness rebelled against the modern ministerial necessity of having to explain things to a lot of people who are quite unable to profit by the explanation and would far rather be watching a football match. In that sense “the modern spirit” was not in him.

But no one accepted more fully and with less reserve the inconveniences of popular government. His attitude towards democracy seemed to be that of a determination to make the best of regrettable facts. He acknowledged its advent to power as a man of science and good sense, but without foregoing his belief in the right of the few to rule the many, and without appearing to derive the smallest inspiration or comfort from its backing. At the same time, he would probably have agreed that “the rule of the people” is a bubble that bursts in the hands of the man bold enough to grasp it. It is indeed very easy to under-rate the humility of King Demos. He knows well enough his final incapacity for the work of government, and will admit it once it is firmly charged upon him. He was wild for political rights so long as they were withheld, but now that he has them his disposition is still as malleable as ever, and the need of ninety-nine men

out of a hundred to be strongly governed just as great. The tremendous revival of the monarchical idea during the last thirty years all over the world—of which “bossism” is the American reflection—is at once a proof of King Demos’s weariness with his new plaything and a hint of the reward that awaits the statesman who has the sense to stand up to him, snatch the ferrule out of his hand and place him on the pupil’s form. The one defect in Lord Salisbury’s adjustment between the theoretical omnipotence of democracy and the actual rulership of such men as himself is that it was too negative. His general attitude towards the vaporings of the populace, whether they chanced to be favorable or adverse to the business he had in hand, was one of disregard. But, whether from sheer intellectual scorn for “the plain, dull man,” or from a horror of display or from a sort of lingering suspiciousness, he did not come boldly forward, as he might have done, to *coerce* the confidence of the people. From whatever cause there was noticeable a lack of driving-power in his leadership; and it is this, really, that gave color to the accusation of his being “unsympathetic.” He preferred trudging along his path, unmindful of criticism and trusting to time to prove him right, rather than taking the trouble of stopping to explain at once whither he was going and why he chose that particular route. Walter Bagehot, in one of his essays, foreshadowed the inner feelings of a man of the Salisbury temperament on getting up to speak in public. “What is the use,” he says to himself, “of talking to these people? They are very well as they are; they believe what they have been brought up to believe, and I shall only bore myself and them if I talk platitudes and only disturb and unsettle them if I talk anything else. Look at that bald-headed man in spectacles. How can one argue with bald-headed men in spectacles? What does he know about foreign politics or anything else? Much better leave him alone and not confuse his mind with a lot of outlandish names.” There was always a suspicion that some such critical scepticism was moving at the back of Lord Salisbury’s mind; and the suspicion had its share in creating a gulf between him and the people and robbing his leadership of some of its due influence. On the other hand he was untiring in educating his party up to the opportunities of their new position, and especially in claiming for the House of Lords its proper weight as an integral part of the constitution and a thoroughly repre-

sentative chamber. Under his auspices Conservatism has ceased to be a policy of mere resistance. It has developed a surprising constructive ability, broadened out into the field of "social legislation," and so effectually knit class with class that the temptation to tamper with the constitution has vanished, and the House of Lords and the Established Church have been saved from attack for another generation at least.

It is only within the last twenty years that Lord Salisbury has built up that largeness of authority from which alone such results could flow. It took people a long while to get over his disquieting reputation for maladroit sarcasm, and the half-mocking, half-impetuous asperity that broke through his harsh reserve. "A great master of gibes and flouts and jeers," said Disraeli of his colleague, adding thereto that his invective lacked "finish." The finish that it lacked was not that of artistic or literary completeness; nothing could well exceed the mordant polish of some of Lord Salisbury's ventures in the gentle art; the defect came rather from a failure to gauge the temper of his audience. The "pettifogging attorney" incident is the stock example of his inability to refrain from pushing a point too far; and at the time when it happened it was no uncommon thing for Lord Robert Cecil to be invited "to reconsider the vocabulary in which he has addressed the House." Only four years ago Lord Salisbury publicly jeered at Spain as "a dying nation," and seemed on one occasion to liken the Irish to Hottentots and on another laughed unmercifully at the electors of Central Finsbury for sending a Parsee, whom he described as "a black man," to represent them in Parliament. A certain very general mistrust of him, as a man of great parts who would not be disciplined, grew out of these indiscretions and did not wholly die away until about the middle of his first Premiership. It was, for instance, the popular belief that Disraeli took him to the Berlin Congress because he did not dare to leave him at home. When he represented England as plenipotentiary at the Constantinople conference of 1876, the *raison d'être* of which was the prevention of war between Turkey and Russia, the opinion of the man in the street was that the government had made a very hazardous choice. Some said that he would fail, others that he would be the mere dupe of Russia, others that he would exceed his instructions, and that there would be no holding him in. It is true he did fail, not from any fault of tem-

per, but simply because success was impossible. Nevertheless, the sense of insecurity provoked by his too reckless excursions in debate, the cordon of mistrust which hedged him round, was not really broken into till Lord Derby's curious failing of nerve when the cabinet seemed on the brink of war with Russia translated Lord Salisbury to the Foreign Office. Within twenty-four hours the new Secretary had launched the vigorous and most capable circular that ultimately forced Russia to submit the Treaty of San Stefano to European verdict. That was an achievement of incalculable value, and the country gladly recognized the nerve and comprehensive judgment that brought it about. Nevertheless, a single incident was enough to revive the old doubts. On the eve of the Berlin Congress a London paper printed what purported to be the *précis* of a secret agreement reached between the British and Russian governments. Questioned as to its accuracy, Lord Salisbury described it as "wholly unauthentic and not deserving of the confidence of your lordships' House." It turned out that the journal was correct in every particular, and the moral sense of England was gravely, though I think very foolishly, shocked to find that a great English nobleman could condescend to such diplomatic arts. Lord Salisbury, it was said, had developed an Italian cast of mind, had fallen under the spell of Disraelian trickery and ambiguity, and forfeited his high reputation for holding fast to principle at any cost. The question lies, of course, quite outside the realm of private ethics, and may be argued indefinitely. The Radicals made a great deal of it, far too much of it in my opinion, and in the long run the common sense of the people revolted against their efforts to enrich the vocabulary of politics with the phrase "to tell a Salisbury." But I think the incident had its share in prolonging the vacancy left by Lord Beaconsfield's death. The mantle fell eventually on the shoulders best fitted to wear it, but only after an interval of not very complimentary hesitation.

I have left myself little space to deal with Lord Salisbury as Foreign Secretary. The keynote of his conduct of that office was a large and luminous patience. As the last surviving actor in the heroic drama of the Berlin Congress, he had a prestige of authority and experience in the chancelleries of Europe such perhaps as no statesman in the world can now call his own. To that reflex and half-inherited advantage he added the reputation of

being a man who never loses his head, who had schooled himself not to expect too much, who was always open to bargain in a spirit of good feeling and common-sense, and instinctively preferred the middle part of moderation and compromise. From Little Englandism he was as far removed as from the monopolizing spirit of advanced Jingoism. No one had a keener sense of England's position and responsibilities, yet no one warned his countrymen more often or more impressively against the dangers of undigested empire. It is this perfect sanity and detachment of outlook that made England repair to him as to an oracle, whose calm, sagacious utterances had the impersonal quality that only the highest statesmanship can command. The utterances, it is true, were occasionally disappointing. After the black week of December, 1899, when the British met with three severe defeats in less than six days, and the people were looking for some word of comfort from their leaders or at least some acknowledgment of past mistakes and promise of future reform, it was, to say the least, disconcerting to find Lord Salisbury languidly complaining that the British constitution was not a good fighting machine. That time he missed the mark, but there have been moments when his knack of taking fanciful views of the gravest situation brought an explosion of reassuring laughter; as when, for instance, he argued that the popular fear of a Russian invasion of India was simply due to the use of small maps. Lord Salisbury's talent for sweeping aside irrelevant details and holding fast to the few central facts was never perhaps seen more clearly than in his Chinese policy. The future will do justice to that, just as we of the present day do justice to his handling of British interests in Africa—Zanzibar, Uganda, Mashonaland, the reconquest of the Soudan, the safeguarding of the Nile and Niger and the quietus placed on foreign interference in South Africa are monuments enough for one man—to his masterly rescue of Crete, and his attitude during the Spanish-American war. So quietly and with so complete an absence of self-advertisement were these triumphs accomplished that people hardly realize Lord Salisbury's share in them. They came, indeed, to look upon him rather as a force than a personality, as a something in the background, very cool and unhurried and grim and wise, that managed somehow to direct the foreign affairs of the country with dignity and credit.

SYDNEY BROOKS.